



Attorney General Jon Bruning

# NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Perre Neilan

402-471-2629

[perre.neilan@nebraska.gov](mailto:perre.neilan@nebraska.gov)

## Attorney General Bruning Announces Killer Identified in 1985 Beatrice Case

**Note: A sound bite on this topic will be available shortly at: <http://www.ago.ne.gov>**

(Lincoln, Neb.) Attorney General Jon Bruning today announced that the killer of Helen Wilson in Beatrice in 1985 has been identified as Bruce Allen Smith of Oklahoma. The identification was made with the use of DNA evidence. Mr. Smith is deceased.

Bruning was joined at the announcement by current Gage County Attorney Randy Ritnour, Beatrice Police Chief Bruce Lang, investigators from the Nebraska State Patrol and three other members of local law enforcement.

“When our office became involved in this case three months ago, we sought the truth,” said Bruning. “Helen Wilson deserves justice, and so do six wrongly convicted people.”

Recent DNA evidence has conclusively shown that Bruce Smith raped and murdered Helen Wilson. Smith’s DNA matches the blood throughout Helen Wilson’s bedroom, blood on a pair of her panties found near her body and the semen found in Helen Wilson’s body.

On February 6, 1985, Helen Wilson, 68, was found raped and murdered in her Beatrice apartment. More than four years later, six people pleaded guilty or were convicted of the crimes.

In late 1989, Joseph White was found guilty of first-degree murder by a 12 member jury. He served 18 years before being granted a new trial October 15 of this year. He was released from custody that day. Bruning and Ritnour said they have filed a motion to dismiss all charges against Joseph White. Thomas Winslow pleaded no contest to aiding and abetting second-degree murder. He served 18 years before being released on October 17 of this year after being resentenced to time already served. Ada Taylor pleaded guilty to aiding and abetting second degree murder and was sentenced to 40 years. She is currently in custody at the Omaha Work Release Center. She will come before the Parole Board on Monday, November 10. Debra Shelden, James Dean and Kathy Gonzalez all pleaded guilty to aiding and abetting second degree murder and were sentenced to 10 years in prison. All three have served their time and been released.

Beatrice Police Chief Bruce Lang said, “The cooperation among law enforcement personnel over the past three months has been excellent. There is no doubt in our minds that Bruce Smith is the lone perpetrator of this crime.”

Smith was one of the original suspects in the case in 1985 but was excluded through the testing methods available at that time. His history shows numerous other arrests, and he was incarcerated in the Oklahoma State Penitentiary from August 10, 1987 to December 15, 1989. In 1992, Smith was hospitalized at Oklahoma Memorial Hospital. He died of AIDS September 29, 1992.

“The victim’s family has suffered through a roller coaster of emotions for the last 25 years. I hope this gives them some final peace and closure,” said Gage County Attorney Randy Ritnour.

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